

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MOSCOW 09318 01 OF 02 281712Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 9318

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SCUL, UR
SUBJECT: ROUNDUP OF MOSCOW ART SCENE

SUMMARY: ON JUNE 23, THE (RELATIVELY) AVANT-GARDE ARTISTS' SECTION OF THE MOSCOW UNION OF GRAPHIC ARTISTS OPENED AN EXHIBIT OF PORTRAIT ART AFTER OVERCOMING THREATS BY THE AUTHORITIES TO FORBID THE DISPLAY OF 30 PAINTINGS. AN EXHIBIT OF REPRESENTATIONAL "CONSERVATIVE" RUSSIAN NATIONALIST ARTIST IL'YA GLAZUNOV FAILED TO OPEN ON JUNE 27 BECAUSE HE DID NOT RECEIVE PERMISSION TO SHOW A POLITICALLY - IF NOT ARTISTICALLY -- CONTROVERSIAL PAINTING. HE CANCELLED THE EXHIBIT, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY. MEMBERS OF THE GROUP OF DISSIDENT ARTISTS HEADED BY OSKAR RABIN HAVE APPLIED FOR PERMISSION TO VISIT FRANCE OR TO EMIGRATE. END SUMMARY.

1. THE AVANT-GARDE. THE EXHIBIT OF PORTRAIT ART BY THE ARTISTS' SECTION OF THE MOSCOW UNION OF GRAPHIC ARTISTS OPENED AT THE UNION'S EXHIBIT HALL ON JUNE 24, ONE DAY LATE. ALTHOUGH THE QUALITY OF ART ON DISPLAY IS UNEVEN, THIS EXHIBIT HAS THE MERIT OF FRESHNESS, BRIGHTNESS, VARIETY, AND A LEVEL OF ORIGINALITY FAR ABOVE THE MEDIOCRITY THAT CHARACTERIZED THE "OFFICIAL" PORTRAIT EXHIBIT AT THE MANEGE LAST MONTH. THE REVIEW
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 MOSCOW 09318 01 OF 02 281712Z

COMMITTEE REPORTEDLY WANTED TO HAVE 30 PAINTINGS TAKEN DOWN. WHEN THE ARTISTS BALKED AND THREATENED TO CANCEL THE EXHIBIT, THE COMMITTEE BACKED DOWN AND REMOVED ONLY TWO PAINTINGS: A PORTRAIT OF ALEKSANDR RABIN BY DLUGIY AND A PAINTING BY SLAVA PROVATOROV IN STYLE OF DALI, ON THE GROUNDS THAT THE LATTER HAD ALREADY BEEN EXHIBITED ELSEWHERE UNDER ANOTHER NAME.

2. ALTHOUGH THE EXHIBIT WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE COMPARED WITH THE MANEGE EXHIBIT TO THE DISADVANTAGE OF THE LATTER, THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE PROBABLY FELT THAT ON BALANCE IT HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO ALLOW IT TO GO ON. BY THEIR VERY NATURE, PORTRAITS TEND TO BE REPRESENTATIONAL AND NON-POLITICAL (PROVIDED SUBJECT IS NON-POLITICAL), AND A PORTRAIT EXHIBIT WAS PROBABLY THE LEAST CONTROVERSIAL THAT THE AVANT-GARDE ARTISTS COULD STAGE. MINISTRY IS NOW IN A TACTICALLY STRONG POSITION TO DRAG ITS HEELS ON MORE CONTROVERSIAL SHOWINGS.

3. THE "CONSERVATIVE." ON THE OTHER HAND, THE ONE-MAN EXHIBIT BY IL'YA GLAZUNOV, SCHEDULED TO OPEN JUNE 27, WAS CANCELLED BY THE ARTIST HIMSELF AT THE LAST MINUTE. GLAZUNOV IS A "CONSERVATIVE" ARTIST WHO TERMS HIMSELF AN OLD-STYLE RUSSIAN NATIONALIST. HIS REPUTATION AMONG FELLOW-ARTISTS IS CONTROVERSIAL; SOME CONSIDER HIM AN ESTABLISHMENT FIGURE, POSSIBLY WITH KGB CONNECTIONS, AND POINT TO A RECENT BREZHNEV PORTRAIT (REPRODUCED IN A RECENT ISSUE OF OGONYEK) AS PROOF OF HIS IDEOLOGICAL ORTHODOXY. IN ANY CASE, GLAZUNOV REPORTEDLY ENJOYS HIGH-LEVEL PATRONAGE ON THE POLITBURO LEVEL, WHERE HE IS SAID TO HAVE DONE PORTRAITS. HIS PRIVILEGES INCLUDE TRAVEL ABROAD; A CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 MOSCOW 09318 01 OF 02 281712Z

LARGE AND ELEGANT STUDIO; AND GOOD MEDIA COVERAGE. A DOCUMENTARY FILM ON GLAZUNOV WAS SHOWN ON TV AS RECENTLY AS LAST WEEK. SOME CALL HIM THE "VIKTOR LOUIS" OF SOVIET ART. GLAZUNOV HIMSELF CLAIMS HE IS HATED BY BOTH THE ESTABLISHMENT AND THE AVANT-GARDE ARTISTS BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT RUSSIAN NATIONALIST VIEWS, HIS REJECTION OF ABSTRACT ART, AND THE PESSIMISTIC OR RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS IN MANY OF HIS PAINTINGS.

4. THE EXHIBIT DID NOT OPEN BECAUSE THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE FORBADE DISPLAY OF HIS "MASTERPIECE" -- A HUGE COMPLEX WALL-SIZED PANORAMA DEPICTING THE SOVIET EXPERIENCE SINCE THE REVOLUTION TO THE PRESENT DAY, ON WHICH HE HAD BEEN WORKING FOR TEN YEARS. PROGRESSING FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, IT SHOWS THE END OF THE MONARCHY WITH NICHOLAS II HOLDING HIS MURDERED, BLEEDING SON; A SERIES OF REVOLUTIONARY FIGURES INCLUDING LENIN AND TROTSKY; STALIN IN HIS COFFIN SURROUNDED BY A SEA OF BLOOD; KHRUSHCHEV WITH A SHOW IN ONE HAND AND AN EAR OF CORN IN ANOTHER; AND FINALLY THE POST-WAR PLEASURE-BENT GENERATION WITH SOLZHENITSYN LOOMING SOMBERLY OVER THE BACCHANALIA.

BREZHNEV IS NOT DEPICTED. THE FIGURE OF
CHRIST FLOATS ABOVE AND A MASS OF HUMANITY TEEMS BELOW
AMID
BARBED WIRE -- ALL IN LURID BLOOD-RED HUES. IT
MAY NOT BE ART, BUT IF THE PAINTING WERE TO BE EXHIBITED,
IT WOULD BE THE TALK OF ALL MOSCOW.

5. ON THE AFTERNOON OF JUNE 27, A CROWD OF ABOUT 300-400
INCLUDING FOREIGN PRESS MILLED AROUND THE HALL
WAITING FOR THE EXHIBIT TO OPEN. INSIDE, CLUSTERS OF
OFFICIALS COULD BE SEEN, ALONG WITH THE ARTIST'S WIFE.
A SIGN ON THE DOOR ANNOUNCED THAT THE EXHIBIT WAS
POSTPONED. EMBOFF WAS TOLD AT SERVICE ENTRANCE THAT
OPENING WAS DELAYED FOR TWO DAYS. A LARGE NUMBER OF
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PAGE 04 MOSCOW 09318 01 OF 02 281712Z

MILITIA WAS PRESENT AND SEEMED NERVOUS.

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PAGE 01 MOSCOW 09318 02 OF 02 281719Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MOSCOW 9318

6. THE DISSIDENTS. FINALLY, WE HEARD THAT OSKAR RABIN,
HIS WIFE, SON, DAUGHTER, AND TWO ARTISTS IN
HIS CIRCLE, KIBLITSKIY AND ZHARKIKH, HAVE ALL APPLIED
FOR PERMISSION TO LEAVE THE SOVIET UNION. RABIN AND
HIS FAMILY HAVE APPLIED TO LIVE IN PARIS FOR THREE
MONTHS TO STUDY FRENCH ART. ZHARKIKH AND KIBLITSKIY
HAVE APPLIED FOR EMIGRATION TO ISRAEL. WE ARE TOLD
THAT ZHARKIKH UNDERSTANDS THAT HE WILL PROBABLY

RECEIVE EXIT PERMISSION. THE CASE OF KIBLITSKIY, WHO HAS BEEN MUCH MORE ACTIVE THAN ZHARKIKH, IS MORE COMPLICATED. HE IS NOT AT ALL SURE THAT HE WILL BE ALLOWED TO LEAVE, BUT HE FEELS THAT THE AUTHORITIES MAY EVENTUALLY DECIDE TO LET HIM GO RATHER THAN CONTINUE THE TWO INVESTIGATIONS (PARASITISM AND VIOLATION OF THE PASSPORT RULES) WHICH ARE NOW IN TRAIN.

RABIN UNDERSTANDS THAT IF HE DOES GET OUT IT IS QUITE LIKELY THAT HIS SOVIET CITIZENSHIP AND THOSE OF HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN WILL BE REVOKED, FORCING HIM TO REMAIN IN EXILE ABROAD. HE SAYS THAT HE IS WILLING TO TAKE THIS RISK, PRINCIPALLY BECAUSE HE IS CONCERNED THAT HIS SON WILL BE IMPRISONED FOR TWO YEARS FOR PARASITISM. RABIN FEELS THAT THE REPRESSION OF UN-OFFICIAL ARTISTS IS INCREASING AND HE SEES NO SIGNS OF ANY STOP TO IT. RABIN SAID THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THAT CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 MOSCOW 09318 02 OF 02 281719Z

ANOTHER UNOFFICIAL ARTIST, TSYEL'KOV, HAD BEEN TOLD TO PICK UP HIS VISA JULY 5.

7. COMMENT: THE WEEK'S DEVELOPMENTS, HOWEVER CONFUSING, SEEM TO LEAVE THE CULTURAL AUTHORITIES SLIGHTLY AHEAD OF THE GAME. THE "AVANT-GARDE" IS HAVING ITS EXHIBIT, BUT IT IS AN INNOCUOUS ONE, AND DOES NOT CAUSE THE AUTHORITIES MUCH PAIN. IF GLAZUNOV IS REALLY AN ESTABLISHMENT FIGURE, THEN HIS PUBLIC SCANDAL WITH THE AUTHORITIES HAS HAD THE EFFECT OF ENHANCING BOTH HIS REPUTATION AS AN ARTIST AND HIS CREDIBILITY AS AN INDEPENDENT FIGURE. WE DO NOT, HOWEVER, RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE GLAZUNOV AFFAIR IS THE RESULT OF A MISCALCULATION, PROBABLY BY THE AUTHORITIES, THAT GLAZUNOV WOULD, IN THE END, BACK DOWN. FOR HIS PART, GLAZUNOV MAY BE PUSHING THE ISSUE AND BANKING ON SUPPORT FROM HIS HIGHLY-PLACED FRIENDS. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THE EXHIBIT IS HELD, WITH OR WITHOUT THE PICTURE. BUT THE REAL DISSIDENT PAINTERS HAVE AGAIN BEEN REDUCED TO IMPOTENCE AND ARE NOW CASTING ABOUT FOR A DIGNIFIED WAY TO LEAVE WITHOUT ADMITTING DEFEAT. MATLOCK

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